

Press Statement: 30 June 2022

Transparency Maldives condemns draft bill encroaching on freedom of expression

Transparency Maldives condemns the draft amendment bill to the Penal Code Act (9/2014) proposed by the Government that encroaches on freedom of expression. This bill is yet another step backwards by the Government, undermining democratic consolidation and fundamental human rights in the Maldives.

While we are deeply concerned by the increasing intolerance, disinformation, hate speech, and xenophobia, these social and political issues cannot be addressed by laws with vague and broad provisions that violate international human rights standards and constitutionally guaranteed fundamental freedoms. Instead, the Government must uphold their duty to protect and promote constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms by promoting dialogue, civic space and a democratic public sphere that is accessible to everyone living in the Maldives.

People must be free to criticise the government and public institutions without fear of prosecution and intimidation – this is a vital feature of a democratic society.

We therefore urge the Government and Members of the People’s Majlis to rescind the proposed bill immediately. The Government should instead seek to address the spread of misinformation and disinformation surrounding foreign policy matters through timely proactive disclosure and promoting transparency in policy decisions.

We reiterate our calls on the Government to live up to its commitments to protect and promote freedom of expression, increase trust in public systems, and remove all impediments against the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of assembly in order to promote political participation without any restriction.